George's PINK PAGES May 2000

SOURCE of INFORMATION

Often I am asked "Where do you get your information about bees, equipment, management techniques and other things?" Other times, people in the audience reveal in their eyes or questioning voice that they think some of my "teaching" is derived from some place "out in space" and they are just going to continue doing "what Daddy did" or listen to Cousin Bill or Mr. Sheetz who has had some bees on his farm off and on for some years. Then, come next year, and I hear that they lost their bees and are getting new packages. Meanwhile, I either sell bees or give them away because I don't lose any.

As much as I have suggested that you buy the 1992 Edition of the HIVE and HONEY BEE as your "bible" for beekeeping, many of you have not. Even though I have read all 1300+ pages of it several times, I refer to it constantly. Because our nectar flow has begun and bees will be extremely busy for the ensuing 30 days converting that nectar into honey, I thought I would read the 55 pages of Chapter 14, authored by Dr. John Ambrose of North Carolina entitled "MANAGEMENT FOR HONEY PRODUCTION", just to make sure that I had not forgotten anything. In so doing, the very first 5 paragraphs of the chapter covers so much of what I have tried to impart to you, I thought it worthwhile to present it here in my PINK PAGES hoping that the writings of one of the select 31 authors of the book would give you justifiable reason to practice the honey bee management philosophies that I teach. Here they are:

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Beekeeping and bee management for honey production is an art, not a science. It may be a science one day when bee researchers and beekeepers have a more complete understanding of bee biology and bee behavior and the environment in which bees live, but that is not yet the case.

The honey bee is not a domesticated animal and most of the "bee management" practiced by beekeepers is really just a matter of accommodating the natural biology and behavior of the bee. F. E. Moeller, in the 1980 issue of the USDA Beekeeping Handbook #335, stated: "Beekeepers in managing or manipulating colonies, are merely facilitating normal biological colony changes to suit their purposes." Management for honey production definitely fits into his description.

Honey bees naturally collect nectar and store surplus honey. Management for honey production by the beekeeper is in reality a system that assists the bees in the process. By providing adequate storage space for the honey surplus, by assuring that the colony have young viable queens, by minimizing bee losses due to diseases, pests, and pesticides, and by other similar activities, the beekeeper is enhancing the honey bee colony's ability to make surplus honey. This necessitates the beekeeper having some knowledge of bee biology and bee behavior as well as some understanding of local plant (floral) sources in order to be a really successful honey producer.

The more the beekeeper knows about his bees, the better he will be in "managing" his bees. For example, swarm prevention is an essential part of good beekeeping management, and the successful beekeeper will develop an understanding of what conditions lead to swarming. Time of year, nectar and pollen availability, and congestion in the hive are just some of the factors contributing to swarming. Unsuccessful swarm prevention management results in decreased honey production because of the decrease in colony size. This can be minimized with a good management system and an understanding of the bees.

There is no set formula or recipe for good bee management, but there are general procedures that should be considered and understood. One consideration is that nectar- and pollen-producing flora vary considerably from area to area and even within area due to elevation and other factors. However, in order for the bees to make surplus honey they must be able to take advantage of the nectar and pollen flows that do occur. Each beekeeper must take these flows into consideration in developing a management system.

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Everyone who has ever listened to me for just a short while or those who have watched me work bees knows of the importance I attach to understanding bee behavior. Now, you note that Dr. Ambrose stresses this also. The "keynote" speaker at EAS 2000 in Salisbury, Maryland just 3 months from now is Dr. Norm Gary, author of Chapter 8 in The Hive and Honey Bee (the most important chapter in the book by my standards), and he is the nation's principal exponent of bee behavior, making him one of my "hero's". If you come to EAS (as you should), you can sit down with Dr. Gary and "quiz him" yourself. It can only result in you becoming a BETTER beeKEEPER or "graduating" from the status of beeHAVER; plus you will begin to find the real JOYS OF BEEKEEPING!

Again, I want to say, when we consider all of the NEW problems, NEW chemicals, NEW management techniques that have appeared in just the past 15 years; e. g., mites, Apistan, Menthol, CheckMite, Apicure, grease patties, parasitic mite syndrome, Africanized bees entering the U. S., small hive beetle, resistant American Foul Brood, the FEAR of being stung by most of the American Public, and more knowledge about pheromones: older books, magazine articles or publications are of little value because they do not cover the items above. Hence, irrespective of the fame of an author or the great acceptance of his book or articles, unless a new addition has been written in the last 8-10 years, the writing is obsolete as far as bee management is concerned in this new 21st century. Further, because of the complexities particularly regarding legal use of treatment material, it is not wise to pay much heed to the sayings of those who are not bee scientists, researchers, or professional apiculturists. I feel that if all beekeepers have a copy of the 3rd Edition (April 1998) of the Beekeepers Hand- book by Dr. Diana Sammaturo plus the 1992 Revised Edition of the Hive and the Honey Bee and thoroughly read both, you will be a successful beekeeper. My PINK PAGES will no longer be needed, and the book that I am writing will be my waste of time.

At least, I hope that you would not bother to read Ralph Nader's famous book, Unsafe at Any Speed, written in 1963 about the Chevrolet Corvair to determine how to fix the brake system on your 1998 Chevrolet Monte Carlo which has both power brakes and disc pads rather than the drums, shoes and lack of power brake of the Corvair.

Kiplinger's CHANGING TIMES is not confined to the money market, but is apropos to communication by computer, heating your sandwich by micro wave, organ trans- plants, successful beekeeping, and my travels and beekeeping on an electric scooter rather than remaining home on crutches. TIMES CHANGE - ARE YOU?